



Take Care in the COLD

Cold Weather Danger is MORE than Ice and Frostbite!!!

Lowering the thermostat to save on heating bills can have devastating effects on older persons. A drop of only a few degrees in body temperature can result in the condition known as hypothermia. When body temperature drops below 96 degrees for a prolonged period, the results of hypothermia can be fatal.

Older people who suffer from arthritis, Alzheimer's or other dementia, thyroid problems, stroke or Parkinson's or who take medications like tranquilizers, sleeping pills or antidepressants have a higher risk for hypothermia.

People over the age of 60 should keep their thermostat at 68 to 70 in living or sleeping areas. Remember that the thermostat temperature does not always show the accurate temperature of the room. If the thermostat or room temperature is lower, dress warmly or use an electric blanket.

To prevent hypothermia, the National Institute on Aging recommends;

- Ask your doctor if the prescription drugs or other over-the-counter drugs you take can affect body temperature regulation.
- Dress warmly in layers of clothing even when indoors. Wear warm clothing to bed and use blankets.
- Ask friends or neighbors to look in once or twice a day if you live alone. See if your local community has a telephone check-in or personal visit service.
- Use alcohol moderately, if at all. Avoid alcohol altogether near bedtime.
- Consume hot foods and liquids to raise your body temperature and keep warm.

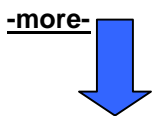
To determine if an older person is suffering from hypothermia, watch for the "umbles" -- stumbles, mumbles, fumbles, and grumbles, which show changes in motor coordination and levels of consciousness. Specific symptoms include:

- Confusion or sleepiness
- Slowed, slurred speech, or shallow breathing
- Weak pulse; low blood pressure
- A change in behavior during cold weather or a change in the way a person looks
- Chilly rooms or other signs that the person has been in a cold place
- Excess shivering or no shivering in a cold room; stiffness in the arms or legs. Poor control over body movements or slow reactions

One sure way to detect hypothermia is by taking a person's temperature. A temperature below 96°F will not register on many oral thermometers. If the temperature reading is at or below 96°F, call 911 immediately. If emergency help is not available right away, move the hypothermic person to a warmer location, and wrap him or her in a warm blanket to stop further heat loss. You can also use your own body heat to keep the person warm. Be gentle and do not rub the skin roughly to get circulation going.

For more information on home energy assistance for low income elders in Milwaukee County contact: the Social Development Commission (414) – 265 7575

Homebound elders should call The Aging Resource Center of Milwaukee County: 289 - 6874





Use Space Heaters Safely to Kill the Chill Not Yourself!

Heating equipment is the leading cause of home fires during the months of December, January and February. Two of every three home heating fires in the U.S. in 1998, and three of every four related deaths, were attributed to space heating equipment.

All types of common space heating equipment are involved in home fires: portable electric heaters, portable kerosene heaters, wood stoves, fireplaces with inserts and room gas heaters.

Safety Tips from the National Fire Prevention Association:

- Space heaters need space. Portable space heaters need a three-foot clearance from anything that can burn and should always be turned off when leaving the room or going to sleep.
- When buying a new unit, make sure it carries the mark of an independent testing lab. Be sure that a qualified technician installs the unit or checks that the unit has been installed properly.
- Wood and coal stoves, fireplaces, chimneys, chimney connectors, and all other solid-fueled heating equipment need to be inspected annually by a professional and cleaned as often as the inspections indicate.
- Use a sturdy fireplace screen to keep sparks from flying into the room.
- Portable kerosene heaters must be fueled only in a well-ventilated area, free of flame and other heat sources, and only when the device has cooled completely. Use only the type of kerosene specified by the manufacturer for that device, and never use gasoline instead of kerosene. Also, be sure that portable kerosene heaters are legal for home use in your state.
- When turning a heating device on or off, be careful to follow the manufacturer's instructions. When buying heaters, look for devices with automatic shutoff features.
- Be sure any gas-fueled heating device is installed with proper attention to ventilation, and never put unvented gas space heaters in bedrooms or bathrooms. Also, LP (liquefied petroleum) gas heaters with self-contained fuel supplies are prohibited for home use by NFPA codes.

Always be sure to check the heater over before using it for the first time. Be sure the unit and the heating elements are free of dust and dirt before starting. Be sure that all the heating elements, coils and chords, plugs and other connections are free from damage and that they are not brittle or cracked from age. Do not overload plugs or extension chords when using the heater.

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For more information from the CDC visit:
www.emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/

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